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§ 8 Ideology and Topography:
Faulkner

Does any feature of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* escape from ideology or is every bit of it, from one end to the other, ideological through and through? How would one recognize the right answer to that question or verify it? What difference would it make if we gave a yes or a no answer to the question? Would we like the novel better or worse if some aspect of it could be shown to be not ideological?

In order to begin to answer these questions, a definition of ideology is necessary. "Ideology" is an odd word. In the English language, it has a complex and to some degree contradictory history, though not a long one. The earliest example in the *O.E.D.* is from 1796. The *O.E.D.* defines ideology either as meaning "The science of ideas; that department of psychology which deals with the origin and nature of ideas," especially as "applied to the system of the French philosopher Condillac, according to which all ideas are derived from sensations," or as meaning, by 1813, "ideal or abstract speculation; in a depreciatory sense, unpractical or visionary theorizing or speculation." The word originally came into English as a borrowing from the French word *idéologie*. *Idéologues* was the name given to Condillac, Destutt de Tracy, and other empiricists who, following Locke, believed in the material or sensationalist origin of ideas. The contradiction inherent in the word today is already present in the earliest uses. On the one hand,

ideology is the science of ideas, a mode of clear and distinct knowledge. On the other hand, ideology is visionary error, a lack of clear and distinct knowledge. In one case, the origin of ideas in sensation is known. In the other case, ideas are freed from their material origin and taken in error as an independently valid realm.

The word "ideology" is used in many conflicting ways today. The word is a battleground fought over by warring ideologies. But in all its uses it bears the marks of its appropriation by Marx and Marxism. It also still retains some version of the contradiction inherent in the word from the start. In the People's Republic of China or in the now defunct Soviet Union "ideology" is (or was) a set of beliefs and practices consciously promulgated by the state. In the United States or Western Europe, by contrast, the word tends to suggest something bad, a set of prejudices and valuations, for example, racial or gender prejudice, taken so much for granted that the victims of ideology are not aware that their prejudices are imaginary, not real. But the latter definition is already present in Marx. In *The German Ideology* Marx sees the Germans as living in a dream world cut off from the material determinants of their lives. As Louis Althusser puts this in his influential essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)": "Ideology, then, is for Marx an imaginary assemblage [*bricolage*], a pure dream, empty and vain, constituted by the 'day's residues' from the only full and positive reality, that of the concrete history of concrete material individuals materially producing their existence."¹

Whether or not Althusser is being entirely fair to Marx here is a complex question. It would require a detailed analysis of *The German Ideology* and other works to answer this question. It can also easily be seen that the words "concrete" and "material" in Althusser's formulations are problematic, to say the least. What Marx says in *The German Ideology* about language can be shown to anticipate what Althusser regards as his own way of going beyond Marx. Althusser conceives his crucial modification of Marx to be seeing ideologies as historical and as materially embodied in everyday practices and in what Althusser calls, in his quaint Marxist

language, "ideological state apparatuses" such as church, school, and mass media. Such apparatuses are opposed to "repressive state apparatuses" like the police. Ideological state apparatuses determine the way we see and evaluate people and things around us. Ideology distorts and screens from our knowledge the real material conditions of our lives. Far from being a pure dream, as for Marx in Althusser's view of him, ideologies for Althusser have a solid reality in radios, television sets, newspapers, school buildings, textbooks, and even in works of high culture like Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*. On the one hand, says Althusser, "Ideology is a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (162). The word "relationship" is important here. Ideology is not a self-enclosed dream world. It is a way of representing the relation between the individual and his or her material existence. On the other hand, for Althusser "an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material" (166). For Althusser this materially embodied ideology interpellates individuals as subjects. Subjectivity, consciousness, is not a natural given but is called into being by various ideological state apparatuses such as family, school, the media: "all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (171). Applying this to *Absalom, Absalom!* one would say that Sutpen, Henry, Charles, Judith, Miss Rosa, and the rest of the novel's characters are not born what they are. They come to be what they are as the result of the impingement on them of various ideological forces. These call them into being as what they are. Whether Faulkner's own presentation agrees with that formulation remains to be seen.

One form of the material existence taken by ideologies is language or, more concretely, some specific text or other, for example, the text of *Absalom, Absalom!*. It is this form of material existence that Paul de Man stresses in the definition of ideology he gives in "The Resistance to Theory." De Man's definition of ideology is close to Althusser's or Marx's, unexpectedly close given their radically different intellectual heritages. For all three ideology is an erroneous relation between consciousness and material reality. For

de Man this mistake goes by way of a linguistic confusion. De Man's definition of ideology is one of the few places where he appeals directly to Marx, specifically to a way of reading *The German Ideology*, as a means of defending literary theory from critics on the left who accuse it of neglecting social and historical reality:

It would be unfortunate, for example, to confuse the materiality of the signifier with the materiality of what it signifies. This may seem obvious enough on the level of sight and sound, but it is less so with regard to the more general phenomenality of space, time or especially of the self; no one in his right mind will try to grow grapes by the luminosity of the word "day," but it is very difficult not to conceive the pattern of one's past and future existence as in accordance with temporal and spatial schemes that belong to fictional narratives and not to the world. This does not mean that fictional narratives are not part of the world and of reality; their impact upon the world may well be all too strong for comfort. What we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenism. It follows that, more than any other mode of inquiry, including economics, the linguistics of literariness is a powerful and indispensable tool in the unmasking of ideological aberrations, as well as a determining factor in accounting for their occurrence. Those who reproach literary theory for being oblivious to social and historical (that is to say ideological) reality are merely stating their fear at having their own ideological mystifications exposed by the tool they are trying to discredit. They are, in short, very poor readers of Marx's *German Ideology*.²

For Marx, Althusser, and de Man, though in a different way for each, ideology is falsehood, error, aberration. It is not entirely clear, however, whether the notion of falsehood and error in question for any of the three is the reciprocal of any notion of attainable truth. It may be that, according to de Man's concept of ideology, Althusser's, or Marx's, we can at best replace one ideology with another. We cannot help confusing linguistic with material realities in one way or another, so we can only replace one error with a different error. We cannot help living our lives according to unconscious assump-

tions that are replaced, when they are brought into the clear light of consciousness, by new unconscious assumptions that just as successfully hide the real material conditions of our lives. For Marx and Althusser even a radical change for the better in the material conditions of production, distribution, and exchange might still leave us subject to the interpellations of ideology that bring the subject into existence. De Man sees study of "the linguistics of literariness," by which he means "rhetorical reading," the study of figurative language in texts, as a powerful tool for unmasking ideological aberrations. Elsewhere, however, for example, at the end of the same essay, he sees even this as leading only to the replacement of illusion by illusion. Behind each mask there is only another mask, not the face of reality. Theory itself, says de Man, is the resistance to theory, that is to say, resistance to the clear seeing and correct reading that would unmask ideological aberrations: "To the extent that they are theory, that is to say teachable, generalizable and highly responsive to systematization, rhetorical readings, like the other kinds, still avoid and resist the reading they advocate. Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory is itself this resistance" (19). Is there any possible escape from these sad scenarios of our domination by ideology? Or, to ask the question more concretely, does Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* have any aspect that might be said to escape from ideology? Does reading *Absalom, Absalom!* free us from ideology or only imbed us more inextricably within it?

It is far easier to identify the features of *Absalom, Absalom!* that are ideological than to find anything in it that escapes ideology. Nor is it all that easy to defend a claim that by dramatizing the suffering caused by Southern ideology Faulkner unmasks that ideology. Too many of the ideological aberrations are asserted by the primary narrator as opposed to the various characters who narrate. Moreover, the image of unmasking presupposes a true face behind. The unmasking of ideology should be a revelation of the truth as well as a showing that aberrations are aberrations. Exactly what true face beyond ideological masking does Faulkner reveal?

No careful reader can doubt that *Absalom, Absalom!* is a magnificent dramatization of the various assumptions about race, gender, and class that make up what might be called "Southern ideology." As is characteristic of Faulkner, this dramatization is made by way of a story that is told with what might be called, in a scarcely excessive oxymoron, hallucinatory realism. Faulkner excels at presenting human consciousness as suspended in amazed outrage at its own situation, poised immobile and at the same time in terrific motion. Emblems of this are Lucas Burch (Brown) in *Light in August* hanging momentarily in the air as he leaps into the boxcar to run once more from Lena Grove ("he sees a man materialise apparently out of the air, in the act of running"),³ or Miss Rosa, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, sitting bolt upright in her chair with her feet not quite touching the floor imposing with implacable intensity her obsessions about the Civil War and about the Surpen story on Quentin Compson.

Like all great novelists, Faulkner embodies a larger historical and social context in a family narrative that might be said to represent it allegorically. I say "allegorically" because the analogies between the one and the other are by no means transparent or literal. An effort of interpretation is required to read one as the expression of the other. In this case the parallels between the Civil War as experienced by the South and the Surpen story are complex and not altogether straightforward. Retrospective contemplation of the two in their intertwining generates the amazement and outrage in the various characters. Rosa's telling is a voice inhabited by Surpen's ghost "by outraged recapitulation evoked,"⁴ just as, much later, Surpen's own telling of his life story to Quentin's grandfather is described as "patient amazed recapitulation" (265). This amazement and outrage might be expressed as two related questions. The first: Why did the South lose the war? or, as Shreve poses his question to Quentin at the end of the novel, "Why do you hate the South?" (378). The second: Why did the Surpen family story have to come out the way it did? or, as Thomas Surpen puts it to Mr. Compson, "You see, I had a design in my mind. Whether it was a good or a bad design is beside the point; the question is, Where did

I make the mistake in it, what did I do or misdo in it, whom or what injure by it to the extent which this would indicate. I had a design" (263).

If the characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* spend their lives going over and over the events of their personal and historical pasts trying to understand them and so free themselves from those pasts, Faulkner's way of telling the story (or the primary narrator's way) matches the recapitulative obsessions of the characters. The "time shifts" that repeatedly violate chronological time are related to the brooding recapitulation that characterizes all the narrators, including the primary one. To Faulkner's way of storytelling in *Absalom, Absalom!* applies perfectly the splendid description by Henry James of Conrad's method of narration in *Chance*. James described Conrad's narrative as "the prolonged hovering flight of consciousness over the outstretched ground of the case supposed." No doubt Faulkner learned much from Conrad in this regard. It is as though all the events of *Absalom, Absalom!*, covering more than a century in time, were going on occurring over and over all at once somewhere in a kind of simultaneous spatial array, so that the primary narrator and each of the narrating characters—Miss Rosa, Mr. Compson, Sutpen, Quentin, and Shreve—can move back and forth across time as though it were a landscape. The narrators anticipate events, withhold facts from the reader, for example, the fact that Charles Bon has African-American blood. They put the story together in the way that will have the most powerful performative effect on the reader.

The compulsion to patient amazed recapitulation that characterizes human consciousness for Faulkner may be defined as subjection to a set of ideological assumptions not seen to be ideological. These assumptions are taken as natural. They are a confusion of linguistic with material or phenomenal reality. Though it may not be easy to decide what Faulkner thinks or what the novel thinks, it is clear that the characters think, mistakenly, that they have been victimized by some malign fate or perhaps by some meaningless mischance or trivial mistake. Their erroneous assumptions about race, gender, and class have prevented them from understanding

the real material conditions of their lives and have brought on their suffering.

Worst of all, these ideological errors are shown in a series of eloquent formulations to be passed from generation to generation, from person to person, by that most ineradicable of human habits: storytelling. We think that if we can just go over the story once more, in outraged recapitulation, explaining it carefully to another person, putting all the ingredients carefully and clearly together, we shall succeed in understanding why it happened as it did and so free ourselves from it. But in retelling the story we succeed only in passing on to others the ideological mistakes that we have not been able to understand and are perhaps in principle doomed never to be able to understand. Quentin broods over the way a story that involves his part of the country and his fellow townspeople but only tangentially his own family nevertheless is determining not only his own life but even the lives of those he knows, for example Shreve, his roommate at Harvard. Such people are entirely outsiders to the Sutpen story and come from a different part of the world. For them the story should be no more than a story, but just hearing infects the hearer with its obsessions: "*am I going to have to hear it all again he thought I am going to have to hear it all over again I am already hearing it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do*" (277). In another passage Quentin invents a splendid image to express this compulsion to a repetition that is like the biblical belief, alluded to obscurely in the title of the novel, that the sins of the fathers are visited on the sons, generation after generation. The biblical allusion in the title is a powerful reinforcement of the concept of repetition the novel dramatizes, since the story of Sutpen, Henry, Charles, and Judith repeats with many differences the story in 2 Samuel of David, Absalom, Amnon, and Tamar, though no character, not even the primary narrator, is shown to be aware of this. In Quentin's case, his incestuous desire for his sister Caddy, the central motif of *The Sound and the Fury*, repeats (proleptically, since *The Sound and the Fury* was

published first, though its action is later), as if by an implacable fatality, the incest motif in *Absalom, Absalom!*, though not the motif of miscegenation. This kind of repetition seems to Quentin like the duplication in one pool of the perturbations in another:

Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm. (261)

Whether or not this belief in an inescapable repetition is itself an ideological construct may be difficult to decide, though nothing more urgently needs deciding. As readers of the novel we are in the situation of Quentin listening to Miss Rosa or Quentin's grandfather listening to Surpen or Shreve listening to Quentin. If the novel is right in what it says about the power of storytelling, then we as readers of *Absalom, Absalom!* can never be in the situation of detached indifferent readers simply learning about Faulkner or about the South or about narrative technique. To read the novel is to subject ourselves to the effects of a speech act. It is a performative rather than a constative event. Far from achieving a liberating understanding, we readers submit ourselves, willynilly, to the pattern of the story. We will be forced in one way or another to repeat that pattern again in our own lives. In order to learn enough of this disquieting fact to try to avoid it we must read the novel. By then it is too late. In seeking knowledge, for example, knowledge about Southern ideology, we have unwittingly and without wishing to do so subjected ourselves already to its perhaps irresistible power. Does the novel offer no possibility of an escape from this fate? That this is no light matter is indicated by the fact that Quentin's obsession with his Southern heritage perhaps contributed to his suicide in 1910, a short time after the "now" of Quentin's reconstruction with

Shreve of the story of Surpen, Henry, Charles, and Judith. This is true, that is, if it is legitimate to link this novel to *The Sound and the Fury*, published several years earlier.

Just what are the ideological errors that cause all this grief and why do they have such power to cause suffering? I have mentioned the Three Fates of contemporary cultural studies: race, gender, and class. Ideological assumptions about all three are materially embodied in the characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* Ideology is also embodied in the characters' way of life, in the concrete material conditions of their existence, in their houses, roads, institutions, in what they have done to the landscape. These assumptions determine what happens in *Absalom, Absalom!* If these assumptions were not so inalterably in place the story could not have happened as it did. Surpen is never shown for one instant suspecting that he may be living his life as the mystified victim of ideological delusions, nor is he shown for one instant suspecting that it might be possible to think otherwise about these things. He is convinced that he has just made some "mistake" that has defeated his project.

1) First, class ideology: Surpen's "design" is generated spontaneously in response to the episode in his childhood that labeled (Althusser would say "interpellated") him poor white trash. The slave house servant in the big plantation who turns him away from the front door and orders him around to the back brings him into existence as a subject. From then on he belongs to the class of poor whites. This new sense of himself does not lead him to want to transform the class structure. That he never questions. It generates, rather, a fierce and unremitting desire to put himself in the place of the white plantation owner. He wants to treat those beneath him, black and white alike, as he has been treated. This desire motivates everything he does until the moment of his death. It even lies behind his final attempt to father a son on poor Milly Jones. His fanatical pursuit of his goal makes his story a hyperbolic Southern version of the American dream. Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby is also a victim of that dream. It is the belief that though you may be born in a log cabin you can end up in the White House: "I had a design. To

accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family—incidentally of course, a wife. I set out to acquire these, asking no favor of any man" (263). No doubt Surpen's refusal to recognize Charles Bon as his son is motivated primarily by racial prejudice. It also has an element of class prejudice. Just as he was fifty years before turned away by the slave servant from the plantation owner's door, so when he has become a slave-owning plantation owner himself he does to another, in this case his own son, what has been done to him. He treats Charles as he has been treated. In doing so he perpetuates, by what seems a fateful repetition, the class as well as racial prejudice that has been imposed on him. The "fate" in this case, however, is his inability to free himself from the ideology that has called him into existence as the subject he is. The connection is made explicit in Quentin's imagination of what must have happened when Henry brought his college friend Charles Bon home for Christmas and Surpen recognized that it was his son by his first marriage to the daughter of the West Indian planter:

he stood there at his own door, just as he had imagined, planned, designed, and sure enough and after fifty years the forlorn nameless and homeless lost child came to knock at it and no monkey-dressed nigger anywhere under the sun to come to the door and order the child away, and Father said that even then, even though he knew that Bon and Judith had never laid eyes on one another, he must have felt and heard the design—house, position, posterity and all—come down like it had been built out of smoke, making no sound, creating no rush of displaced air and not even leaving any debris. (267)

Second, gender ideology: If Surpen's "design" is determined by class assumptions, his way of carrying it out is determined by certain presuppositions about male nature and power. The mythologized memory of Confederate bravery and suffering during the Civil War is the broader social concomitant of this. Surpen's self-contained silence, his indomitable, stubborn bravery in carrying out his design against all odds, his prowess as a hunter, his

naked battles with one or another of his slaves while his male neighbors look on as audience—all these make him a hyperbolic version of the stereotypical strong, silent American frontier male.

Abalom, Abalom! is also permeated by certain ideological presuppositions about the "nature" of women. These are not only expressed by characters like Mr. Compson, Quentin, or Shreve. They are also expressed by the primary narrator. Not just Surpen but all Yoknapatawpha society shares some version of these presuppositions. The features of the Southern gender ideology about women make a complex and not entirely coherent whole. The lack of coherence makes this set of preconceptions all the more able to motivate actions that seem to be based on material reality, the supposed "nature" of women, but are in fact motivated, as de Man puts it, by a confusion of linguistic with phenomenal reality.

One element in this intertwined set of what might be called "ideologemes" sees women as unfathomably mysterious and strong. They are strong both in love and in hate. This is expressed succinctly in a thought Shreve imagines Charles Bon as having about his mother: "maybe he knew now that his mother didn't know and never would know what she wanted, and so he couldn't bear her (maybe he learned from the octoroon [his mistress before he meets Judith] that you can't bear women anyhow and that if you are wise or dislike trouble and uproar you dont even try to)" (310). Women have motivations that remain impossible for men to understand, that men should primarily respect and fear. Examples are Miss Rosa's implacable hatred of Surpen, or Ellen Coldfield's incomprehensible dream world, or Judith's inscrutable faithfulness to Charles Bon and her stoic silence after his death, or Surpen's Haitian wife's prolonged, implacable revenge, her willingness to sacrifice her son to get even with Surpen for having repudiated her. These women are presented more or less from the outside, from the male perspective, for example, in what Quentin says to himself about Rosa Coldfield: "Beautiful lives women live—women do. In very breathing they draw meat and drink from some beautiful attenuation of unreality in which the shades and shapes of facts—of birth and bereavement, of suffering and bewilderment and

despair—move with the substanceless decorum of lawn party charades, perfect in gesture and without significance or any ability to hurt" (211). Such women are incomprehensible to men, however hard men may try to understand them. Nevertheless, one thing is sure. Faulkner's women are presented as just as obsessed, just as mad as the men are, just as much caught up in the prolonged recipitulation of some decisive event of the past that has frozen them in the terrific immobility of a backward look. The past event that obsesses them is almost always some wrong done them by men: Surpen's first wife's outrage at Surpen's repudiation of her; Judith's mourning as a widowed virgin after the death of Charles Bon, slain by her other brother; Miss Rosa's decades-long obsession with the insult Surpen dealt her.

Another Southern ideologue sees women as valuable only so long as they remain absolutely pure, innocent, virginal, white as snow. This facet of Southern gender ideology may help to explain Faulkner's fascination with the theme of brother-sister incest. He is said to have suggested more than once to crews of script writers with whom he collaborated in Hollywood that when you get stuck with a script the solution is to introduce incest. Just as for the Egyptian Pharaohs or for the French nobleman John, Duke of Lorraine (to whom Henry Surpen appeals in his mind as a justification for the marriage of his sister Judith and his half-brother Charles Bon), so for Henry in *Absalom, Absalom!* or for Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*, the only way to preserve a sister's purity is, paradoxically, to marry her yourself. In Henry's case, the strategy is to marry his sister vicariously by way of her marriage to the half-brother whom he loves with an abject homosexual adoration and identification. If he can join together Judith and Charles he can join himself to both of them in a heterosexual homosexual triangle that is the only thing capable of satisfying his secret desires.

The complex of contradictory ideologemes about women includes, finally, the assumption that the real purpose of women is to bear children, to carry on the male line. In order to make certain this happens without any contamination, women must be kept

altogether innocent and pure before marriage. Men are permitted to visit brothels, to father children on their slaves, or to keep mistresses without any stain on their honor or blemish on their right to marry pure women and father sons to carry on their names. The novel ascribes to Surpen an ugly analogy to express this conviction that women are valuable only as a means of producing sons. When he insults Miss Rosa, who would eagerly have married him, by suggesting that they mare first and then marry if she produces a son, this is described by Miss Rosa as "the bald outrageous words [spoken] exactly as if he were consulting with Jones or with some other man about a bitch dog or a cow or a mare" (168). Later Surpen is killed by Wash Jones because he repeats the same insult in what he says to Wash's granddaughter Milly just after she has borne Surpen a daughter on the same day his mare has foaled to his black stallion: "Well, Milly; too bad you're not a mare too. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable" (286).

Third ideological motif, race: Of the three motifs, class, gender, and race, race is without doubt the most important by far. Southern society was built on slavery and on the ideological assumptions about race that accompanied slavery: the radical differences between blacks and whites, the inferiority of African Americans to European Americans, the ineradicable contamination that even a drop of black blood causes in a white man or woman, the assumption that it is all right for a white man to father children on a black woman, though he has no responsibility to accept such children as his own, while the mating of a black man with a white woman is an abomination. The ugly word "nigger" echoes through *Absalom, Absalom!* as the invidious name that holds in a single sound all those ideological assumptions, as when Charles Bon at a climactic moment in the novel says to his half-brother Henry: "So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear. . . I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry" (356, 358).

All the decisive events of *Absalom, Absalom!* are the result of racial ideologemes. The civil war was fought, at least in part, to protect the institution of slavery and in the name of all the ideological

assumptions that went with slavery. The fact that Surpen is turned away from the plantation owner's door by an African American servant is an important part of his humiliation in the primal scene that calls him into being as what he is. He repudiates his first wife when he discovers she has African American blood. He refuses to accept his son by that marriage as his own for the same reason, though if he had given Charles Bon the least sign of recognition Charles would have been satisfied and his murder at Henry's hand would not have occurred. The building of Surpen's Hundred depends on slavery and on the twenty "wild" African Americans Surpen brings to help him build his plantation, just as the colonialism in Haiti where Surpen meets his first wife is built on slavery. If the reader tries to imagine *Absalom, Absalom!* for a moment without those racial ideologies (it is not easy to do so) the whole novel vanishes in smoke just as instantly as Surpen's design vanished when he saw that the friend Henry was bringing home from college was his son by the first, "tainted" marriage. Everything that happens in *Absalom, Absalom!* depends on the ideology of racism and would be impossible without it.

Whatever Surpen does, every move in his life is in response to the call on him of one or another of the set of assumptions making up Southern ideology. If he is the blind victim of that ideology, his mystifications cause him to inflict prolonged, unremitting suffering on all those around him: Eulalia Bon, Ellen Coldfield, Henry, Judith, Charles Bon, Clyrie, Miss Rosa. They too share his ideological assumptions and are victims of them as much as he is.

Does the novel offer the reader no possible escape from being the momentary last in the line of those called to act somnambulistically according to the patterns of judgment Southern ideology determines?

It is by no means easy to answer that question. On the one hand, it could be argued that the hyperbolic presentation in *Absalom, Absalom!* of Southern ideology in all its complexity, along with the dramatization of the savage retribution of suffering brought on those who live their lives according to that ideology, make of the

novel a critique of ideology, an exposure of its mystifications.⁵ Shreve the Canadian is the reader's representative. He is the outsider who wants to understand the South and who, so the notes at the end tell the reader, lives on to become a practicing surgeon in Edmonton, Alberta. His survival is evidence that it is possible to know about Southern ideology and not be destroyed by it.

On the other hand, the novel shows Shreve joining with Quentin in the imaginary reconstruction of the events of the novel. Shreve becomes, like Quentin, identified with Henry and Charles as they ride together toward the moment when Henry will turn on his horse to shoot his brother, kill him "dead as a beef" (133). Moreover, as I have already shown, the novel constantly reinforces the notion that patterns of belief and action ineluctably perpetuate themselves from generation to generation in blind repetitions. These repetitions are like the way the characters in *Absalom, Absalom!* repeat the biblical story of David, Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom without being shown even to be aware of it. Since ideology is by definition unconscious, how could we be sure that reading *Absalom, Absalom!*, or perhaps not even reading it, just hearing about it, or just living in the same nation in which it could be written, might lead us unwittingly to repeat in our own lives something like Surpen's unwillingness to recognize Charles Bon as his son or the blind submission of Ellen and Rosa Coldfield to Surpen's commands (not really proposals) that they marry him, the one acceptance duplicating the first many years after?

On the one hand, the novel may give knowledge about ideology that might help liberate us from it. On the other hand, the novel may have an irresistible performative effect that goes against that knowledge. The epistemological and performative dimensions of the novel may go in different directions. It might be difficult if not impossible to decide which one would win out in a given case, for example in my rereading of *Absalom, Absalom!* in order to write this essay.

Without trying to mitigate either the difficulties or the urgencies of this need to decide, I turn back to the novel for a look at several

elements not yet identified. These might tip the balance toward saying that *Absalom, Absalom!*, if it is read with vigilance, may not so much free the reader from ideology as put him or her in a new position where a decision about it may be made, must be made. The knowledge reading the novel provides is performative in the sense that it puts the reader in a new situation. Reading *Absalom, Absalom!* imposes on the reader a new responsibility and makes necessary a new decision. The novel itself gives the reader the terms in which this might be understood.

Reading the novel puts the reader in a situation different from that of any of the characters. We see the whole novel, hear the stories all the characters tell, and benefit in addition both from the narrator's commentary and from Faulkner's careful organization of the various blocks of narration so they have the effect created by these juxtapositions. Reading the novel is not just a passive act of absorption. It is an active intervention. Reading *Absalom, Absalom!* requires the reader to make energetic efforts. He or she must put two and two together, emphasizing this or that passage, filling in gaps. For the results of these acts of reading the reader must take responsibility. If the reader repeats the ideology the novel gives knowledge of, this is something for which the reader can be blamed, even though what happens in reading happens, willynilly.

Two passages in the novel articulate the way the activity that might be called "reading" in an extended sense is not an automatic passing on of a certain pattern but a violently neutral transition space, like the "terrific immobility" of consciousness as Faulkner defines it. What passes through that space, the space of decision, comes out different on the other side. For that difference the reader must be held liable.

My argument here shifts the focus from Althusser's opposition between seeing and knowing to a relation that is not simply oppositional between knowing and doing, or between seeing/knowing and doing. By stressing the performative effect of reading or storytelling, I propose an alternative paradigm for the way a work of literature puts its reader in a different situation. In this new situation new decisions and new acceptances of responsibility must

take place. Like all decisions and acceptances of responsibility, the ones demanded by reading can never be based on sufficient knowledge, that is, on knowledge fully justifying the decision or the taking of responsibility. Like all ethical acts they are performative leaps in the dark, what Faulkner calls, in a passage discussed below, "overpassing to love."

The first passage is the speech Judith makes when she gives Charles Bon's letter to Quentin's grandmother. This is the same letter that Quentin's father gives him to read, to make of what he will. She begins by saying that life is "like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they don't know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug" (127). Judith then goes on to assert that in any case the end-point of each life is "a block of stone with scratches on it provided there was someone to remember to have the marble scratched and set up or had time to, and it rains on it and the sun shines on it and after a while they don't even remember the name and what the scratches were trying to tell, and it doesn't matter" (127). The conclusion she draws from this and the decision she makes for action is a strange non sequitur from the grim darkness of this view of human life. She says the thing to do is to pass something on that will make a mark or scratch not on dead stone but on a living person. This is obviously an image of our own activity as readers of the novel. We allow ourselves to be marked by the text. Judith, however, emphasizes not the legibility of the scratch but its materiality and the fact that it is inscribed not on a block of stone but on living mortal flesh, flesh that is living because it can die:

And so maybe if you could go to someone, the stranger the better, and give them something—a scrap of paper—something, anything, it not to mean anything in itself and them not even to read it or keep it, not even bother to throw it away or destroy it, at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even

a) Judith's
speech...

if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another, and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that *was* once for the reason that it can die someday, while the block of stone can't be *it* because it never can become *was* because it can't ever die or perish. (127-28)

Judith distinguishes between two kind of marks or scratches. The distinction is not, as might have been expected, between random, meaningless marks, on the one hand, and significant marks like letters, on the other. No, from the perspective of the distinction she is making, both kinds of marks work in the same way. The distinction is rather between marks of any kind made on stone and those made on flesh. Scratches made on stone, for example, the inscriptions on the Surpen tombstones Quentun visits with his father in the cedar grove, are not happenings. They are not events because they are made on something that cannot die, that is outside time. Only living flesh, flesh that is mortal, is within time, has a history, and can remember. Therefore only a mark made on living flesh is an event in the present. Such a mark is an *it* because it can become *was*, whereas a tombstone has no *it* because it cannot become *was*. Just as Miss Rosa, as Quentun realizes, tells Quentun about Surpen because "she wants it told" (10) to others so her anger, hatred, and shame will be perpetuated, so Judith takes Bon's letter to Quentun's grandmother not so she can read it but so it can just make an impression on her flesh and thereby be given a kind of immortality as it is passed on to Quentun's father, then to Quentun, and then to us as readers.

This concept of a memory that is material rather than legible escapes ideology. It recalls Marx's emphasis in *The German Ideology* on the way ideology is bodily, material, not the highest but the lowest. Ideology is, paradoxically, consciousness that is without consciousness. It is part of obscure organic life, not above it in some ideal realm.⁶ Faulkner's notion of the materiality of memory is not only an explanation of the way ideological elements are passed from generation to generation, it also shows that in the moment of passing the recipient is liberated from being the blind repetition of

a previous pattern. The person receiving the mark is given freedom and the responsibility to decide. This freedom is inserted in the interval between seeing the marks as mere scratches and seeing them as legible. The one who is marked has to decide how to read them and what to make of them.

1) Judith's notion of a memory that is primarily material, only secondarily articulated and readable, links this passage with the topographical motifs in the novel. Like Hardy or Trollope, Faulkner has a strongly topographical imagination. The events of his novels take place within an elaborately mapped mental or textual landscape in which characters are associated with places. The configuration of houses, roads, fields, rivers, swamps carries a considerable part of the meaning of the novel. Like Trollope and Hardy, Faulkner made an actual map of the landscape within which his novels take place. That map is reproduced at the end of the Vintage edition of *Absalom, Absalom!*. The legend identifies it as "Jefferson, Yoknapawpha Co., Mississippi, William Faulkner, Sole Owner and Proprietor." On that map the reader can see the location of Surpen's Hundred, of Miss Rosa Coldfield's house, of the "Church which Thomas Surpen rode fast to," and of the "Fishing Camp where Wash Jones killed Surpen." Even without the literal map the reader produces a mental map of the landscape as she or he reads. The landscape is like the tombstone in Judith's speech. It remains after the characters have died, marked with the signs of their living. These marks remain in an aretemporal spatial array, in which Surpen's building of Surpen's Hundred, his marriage, and his death are simultaneous. The reader understands the novel in terms of the movements of the characters across it, the changes they make in it. Examples are that slow movement of Surpen's family when he is a child back from the West Virginia cabin to the Tidewater plantation where he is refused entrance at the front door, or Faulkner's presentation of the later stages of the Civil War as the constant movement of retreat by the Confederate Army, or Surpen's physical embodiment of his design in the making of Surpen's Hundred.

Immobile, bearded and hand palm-lifted the horseman sat; behind him the wild blacks and the captive architect huddled quietly, carrying in bloodless paradox the shovels and picks and axes of peaceful conquest. Then in the long unamaze Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table beneath the up-palm immobile and pontific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the *Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*. (8-9)

For Faulkner, as for Althusser and for Marx, ideology is not something abstract and dreamlike, the confusion of linguistic with material reality. That confusion is, literally, embodied. It is marked on the bodies of the human beings who are mystified by the ideology. It is embodied in another way in all the material changes men and women have made on the "tranquil and astonished earth," turning that earth into a landscape, a topography. That remade earth, a kind of remainder or *Dreck*, according to the undialectical dialectic or dialectic of a movement in place Marx and Engels sketch out, becomes the scene in which the evil done by ideological aberrations can work itself out. Subjectivity, including all the subject's ideological presumptions, is inseparable from his or her body. Not just the minds but the bodies, too, of Sutpen, Rosa, Judith, Clytie, and the rest are the incarnations of their "stubborn and amazed outrage" (174).

Subjectivity, including its ideological presumptions, is also diffused into the landscape. It is not just projected there but incarnated there. Sutpen, in Rosa's sense of him when he returns to his ruined plantation after the war, is:

absent only from the room, and that because he had to be elsewhere, a part of him encompassing each ruined field and fallen fence and crumbling wall of cabin or cotton house or crib; himself diffused and in solution held by that electric furious immobile urgency and awareness of short time and the need for haste . . . not . . . anywhere near the house at all but miles away and invisible somewhere among his hundred square miles which they had not troubled to begin to take away from him yet, perhaps not even at this point or at that point but

diffused (not attenuated to thinness but enlarged, magnified, encompassing as though in a prolonged and unbroken instant of tremendous effort embracing and holding intact that ten-mile square while he faced from the brink of disaster, invincible and unafraid, what he must have known would be the final defeat). (160, 162-63)

If the earth, like a stone, cannot have a history, cannot be *is* because it can never be *was*, nevertheless for Faulkner the earth turned into topography is essential to the making material of human history. This is analogous to the way Judith's love for Bon and his for her is carried from generation to generation by way of its material embodiment in the letter. The bare earth made topography, like Bon's letter to Judith, is an essential medium of communication between one person and another, one generation and another.

Faulkner articulates this in a passage explaining that the fact that Shreve too came from the Mississippi trough helps explain why he is able to understand as well as he does Quentin's heritage of family and regional history: "both born within the same year: the one in Alberta, the other in Mississippi; born half a continent apart yet joined, connected after a fashion in a sort of geographical transubstantiation by that Continental Trough, that River which runs not only through the physical land of which it is the geologic umbilical, not only runs through the spiritual lives of the beings within its scope, but is very Environment itself which laughs at degrees of latitude and temperature" (258). Faulkner's insight into the role of landscape in making ideology concrete is another non-ideological element in the novel, like Judith's distinction between marks on flesh and marks on stone.

This insight is reinforced in another crucial passage in the novel, the one describing the imaginative recreation of the lives of Sutpen, Henry, Judith, Bon, and Rosa in the collective recapitulation by Quentin and Shreve. When a mark making history is transferred from one topographical locale to another, it is made material in a new way and in a new situation. The role of material surroundings

7
not conscious
flesh vs. stone
material vs. immaterial
with/without

in making possible a new start, not just a passive repetition, is signaled in the novel's vivid emphasis on how the ice-cold Harvard dormitory room where Quentin and Shreve sit up long after midnight is so different from the wisteria and cigar-smoke scented porch where Quentin's father had passed the story on to him. The re-creation of the story by Quentin and Shreve is a free (and yet bound) response made to a demand for narration inherent in the facts as Quentin knows them. Quentin and Shreve go beyond the data, as has Faulkner in his writing of a great novel about the South. All three have created new stories with their own coherence and meaning. For this new coherence and meaning, as well as for the effects this may have on those who hear it, Quentin, Shreve, and Faulkner can be held liable. This is the case even though this new version of the story is a result of the marks made on them by the events and even though the effects on us as readers are irresistible, since what happens in reading happens as it happens.

This remaking and re-embodiment is defined by Faulkner, in a brilliant phrase, as an "overpassing to love." The love in question is first that of Judith, Henry, and Bon for one another. But the imaginative recreation of the past is also an overpassing to love. The love reached by "overpassing" is not just the love between Judith, Henry, and Bon, seen as something positive and a going beyond the situation that has been imposed on them by their father. It is also the love between Shreve and Quentin and their love for Judith, Henry, and Bon. These new loves repeat the old ones and are the result of a joint act of re-creation. In a similar way our relation as readers to the characters in the novel is also a kind of love. Love here is the name for a relation to history and to other people that may transform ideology and provide the glimpse of an escape from it:

all that had gone before [had been] just so much that had to be overpassed and none else present to overpass it but them, as someone always has to rake the leaves up before you can have the bonfire. That was why it did not matter to either of them which one did the talking, since it was not the talking alone which did it, performed and accom-

plished the overpassing, but some happy marriage of speaking and hearing wherein each before the demand, the requirement, forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of the other—faultings both in the creating of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) and in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true, or fit the preconceived—in order to overpass to love, where there might be paradox and inconsistency but nothing fault nor false. (316)

Ideological presuppositions have a stubborn recalcitrance. They tend to form themselves again even when we think they have been abolished. Nevertheless, *Absalom, Absalom!* gives the reader a momentary free space in which he or she might go beyond ideology—if he or she chooses to do so. It does this not so much in its exposure of Southern ideology and its malign effects, as in its demonstration of how those malign effects are determined by the embodiment of the ideology in topography and in the bodies of those subject to it. Understanding here is a possible means of liberation. This will happen if the right action occurs in response to "the demand, the requirement," in this case if changes are effected in the material conditions that supported Southern ideology in the first place. This does not mean that knowledge guarantees right action. Knowledge never determines either decision or the effects that follow action. An incommensurability between knowledge and action remains the human condition. Nor does knowledge of the past give foreknowledge of what will happen in the future if we follow a certain course of action. But it does change our relation to the past. That change provides a new space within which decision and action are possible.

Social Research (1991): 1. Hillis Miller, "The Disarticulation of the Self in Nietzsche," *Monist* 64 (April 1981): 247-61. Lacoue-Labarthe's essay is a comprehensive discussion of Nietzsche's early writing on rhetoric. It was first published in the issue of *Poétique* cited above in note 1.

7. Another way to formulate this, as Steven Mailloux reminds me, would be to say that the initial distinction between literal and metaphorical language breaks down, leaving a single realm of language that is neither literal nor figurative. But that distinction underwrites the possibility of answering a question about what something is: "Was ist also Wahrheit?" In the disappearance of the distinction between literal and figurative language, the possibility of answering in literal language questions about what something is also vanishes. It is replaced by a potentially endless series of carachreses for an unknown X. Since that X remains forever unknown, it cannot ever be literally named. What is truth? Well, I cannot give you an answer to that in so many literal words. I can only answer in one or another carachres. Truth is a mobile army. Truth is a worn coin.

8. See Meijers and Singelin, "Konkordanz," 352-60.

9. For exceptions, see Martin Heidegger, "Wer ist Nietzsches Zarathustra," *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1967), trans. as "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra," trans. Bernd Magnus, *The New Nietzsche*, ed. David B. Allison (New York: Dell, 1977), 64-79; Bernard Pautrat, "Retour à l'est," *Versions du Soleil* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), 329-61.

10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1966), 2: 447, henceforth "ZG." *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1959), 312, henceforth "ZE." References will be given in the text.

11. I have approached this question from a different direction in "Gleichnis in Nietzsches *Also Sprach Zarathustra*," *International Studies in Philosophy* XVII, 2 (1985), 3-15, reprinted in *Theory Now and Then* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 277-91.

12. See Charles Singleton, "In Exitu Israel de Aegyptio," *Dante: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Freccero (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1965), 102-21; Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* 205: "The paradigm for all texts consists of a figure (or a system of figures) and its deconstruction. But since this model cannot be closed off by final reading, it engenders, in its turn, a supplementary figural superposition which narrates the unreadability of the prior narration. As distinguished

from primary deconstructive narratives centered on figures and ultimately always on metaphor, we can call such narratives to the second (or third) degree *allegories*."

13. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Bantam, 1967), 110. "The Book" is presumably the Koran.

14. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie, Werke*, ed. Karl Schlechta, I, 12. The translation is by Carol Jacobs, who quotes this passage as one of the epigraphs to her brilliant essay, "Nietzsche: The Stammering Text: The Fragmentary Studies Preliminary to *The Birth of Tragedy*," *The Dissimulating Harmony* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 3-22.

Chapter 8

1. In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press), 160. Other references to this essay will be given by page number in the text.

2. Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 11.

3. William Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 386.

4. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 8. Further references will be identified by page numbers from this edition.

5. Althusser, in "A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspré" (April 1966), allows for this possibility but makes a problematic distinction between seeing and knowing: "I believe that the peculiarity of art is to 'make us see' [*nous donner à voir*], 'make us perceive,' 'make us feel' something which *alludes* to reality. . . . What art makes us see, and therefore gives to us in the form of 'seeing,' 'perceiving,' and 'feeling' (which is not the form of 'knowing') is the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*. . . . When we speak of ideology we should know that ideology slides into all human activity, that it is identical with the 'lived' experience of human existence itself: that is why the form in which we are 'made to see' ideology in great novels has as its content the 'lived' experience of individuals. . . . If I wanted to use Spinoza's language again here, I could say that art makes us 'see' 'conclusions without premisses,'

whereas knowledge makes us penetrate into the mechanism which produces the 'conclusions' out of the 'premisses.' This is an important distinction, for it enables us to understand that a novel on the 'cult,' however profound, may draw attention to its 'lived' effects but *cannot give an understanding of it*; it may put the question of the 'cult' on the agenda, but it cannot *define the means* which will make it possible to remedy these effects" (Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 222–24). I owe this citation to discussions of it in an excellent unpublished dissertation by Byron Caminero-Santangelo, "Failing the Test: Narration and Legitimation in Conrad's Short Fiction" (University of California, Irvine, 1993) and in an unpublished paper by David McClemont, "Just You and I: Addressing the Reader in Althusser and Eliot" (1992), as well as to a brilliant discussion of ideology in Althusser in an unpublished paper by Thomas Albrecht, "Ideology as a Literary Form: On Aesthetic Ideology in Althusser." I agree with Caminero-Santangelo that what Althusser says appears to be absurdly condescending to art. Surely novels can, and in fact in some cases conspicuously do, give rigorous knowledge of the mechanisms that produce ideologies. Moreover, Althusser's distinction between seeing and knowing seems difficult if not impossible to maintain. If you "see" something you also "know" it, at least according to an association of seeing and knowing that goes in our tradition back to Aristotle.

6. In several remarkable pages in *The German Ideology* (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, V [New York: International Publishers, 1976], 41–45; Karl Marx, *Die Deutsche Ideologie*, in his *Die Frühschriften*, ed. Siegfried Landshut [Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1971], 354–59; cited hereafter as "E" and "G"), Marx (who was evidently the sole author of these pages) attempts to show a world-historical progression whereby the human race separated itself from the animals as consciousness, language, society, and the division of labor gradually developed toward the production of ideology. Marx apparently wants to show how ideology, something detached from matter, from human beings' actual material conditions of existence, was born out of materiality, the materiality of nature, of animal life, of the body, even out of the materiality of language and consciousness, or of language as the material embodiment of consciousness, inseparable from consciousness, as well as out of the concrete material conditions of production, circulation, and exchange. In trying to do this, Marx shows, perhaps in spite of himself, that you cannot detach ideology from materiality. Over and over, at each

stage of the universal historical progression he sketches out, he shows (1) that you cannot see how to get from one stage to the next, or think the transition, though (2) the transition does nevertheless occur, by a species of unfathomable or unintelligible leap, while nevertheless (3) a leap is not necessary because all the later stages were always already there from the beginning. These three things are asserted at once in undialectizable contradiction. The different "moments" (*Momente*), to use Marx's word, are not each negations of the previous ones, but related in a different way, as new configurations of a non-synthesizable "contradiction" (*Widerspruch*). Every new stage that is reached turns out to be materiality all over again, not free, detached, ineffective superstructure, as ideology is supposed to be for Marx, something without purchase on the real world because it is wholly disembodied, as Marx does seem to assert. The most striking case of the impossibility of freeing ideology from materiality comes toward the end of the passage, when he comes to the stage of ideology proper. He identifies this with the appearance of priests. Since priests are celibate they do not participate in the productive division of labor in the sex act, said by Marx to be the primal and originary example of the division of labor. A little later in the passage, ideology, for example, nationalist ideology, turns out to be "muck" and then "trash," in the German, *Dreck*. *Dreck* is not just mud, refuse, trash, but also dung, feces. Ideology, this passage asserts, is not the free-floating spirit of superstructure, but the residue or remainder left over after the material process of eating, consumption, digestion, and defecation. Ideology, far from being the highest, is the lowest, the most material thing of all, a leftover, remainder, or residue. Ideology is, literally, materially, *Dreck*, in the English vernacular, "shit." So ideology is matter, a particularly low, disgusting, useless (except for fertilizer) kind of matter. Once more the process of history, even at its most advanced stage, the stage of industrial capitalism, has not advanced beyond its starting point in materiality. If you begin with materiality, you cannot get beyond it. Materiality is a beginning that does not begin and yet is abundantly productive. It produces history, by a process whereby it is continually starting and making things happen without ever getting anywhere beyond itself. A careful reading of this passage in the original German would be necessary to show in detail the way it continuously advances through stages, from *Moment* to *Moment*, without ever succeeding in leaving materiality behind. Consciousness (*Bewußtsein*), for example, appears to arise quite late in the development of social man from the animals, but conscious-

ness is still and always has been materialized in language, from which it cannot be distinguished. Language is the material "outring" of consciousness for social relations, but language is not added later to a consciousness already there. "Language is as old as consciousness" ("Die Sprache ist so alt wie das Bewußtsein") (E44; G357). The whole passage about language and consciousness puts this assertion in context. It is an extremely important passage for understanding Marxism: "Only now, after having considered four moments [*Momente*], four aspects of primary historical relations, do we find that man also possesses 'consciousness.' But even from the outset this is not 'pure' consciousness ['reines Bewußtsein']. The 'mind' ['*Geist*'] is from the outset afflicted with the curse [*den Fluch*] of being 'burdened' ['*behaftet*'] with matter ['*der Materie*'], which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language [*der Sprache*]. Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical, real consciousness that exists for other men as well, and only therefore does it exist for me; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse [*des Verkehrs*] with other men. Where there exists a relationship [*ein Verhältnis*], it exists for me: the animal does not 'relate' ['*verhält*'] itself to anything, it does not 'relate' itself at all" (E43-44; G356-57). The same moving forward through history to a higher abstraction and differentiation that does not leave matter behind, that remains essentially materialized, is repeated a little later in the passage about modern nationalist ideology I have referred to above. The ideology of nationalism is "muck" (these phrases are not in the German edition, but the word was possibly *Dreck*), not pure spirit, but dung. It seems to a given nation that the contradiction between a national and a general or international consciousness is entirely internal: "since this contradiction [*Widerspruch*] appears to exist only as a contradiction within the national consciousness, it seems to this nation that the struggle too is confined to this national muck, precisely because this nation represents this muck as such. Incidentally, it is quite immaterial [*ganz einerlei*] what consciousness starts to do on its own: out of all this trash [*aus diesem ganzen Dreck*] we get only the one inference that these three moments, the productive forces, the state of society and consciousness, can and must come into contradiction with one another" (E45; G, only in part, 358). Ideology, what consciousness starts out to do on its own, is not *Geist* but *Dreck*, the material remainder of a material historical process resulting from a division of labor, "which was originally nothing but the division of labor

in the sexual act" ("die Teilung der Arbeit im Geschlechtsakt") (E44; G58). Or, rather, the *Geist* and the *Dreck* go inextricably together, like consciousness and its necessary materialization in language. The *Dreck* of ideology takes the form of abstract or idealist "mental expressions," which are concomitant images of material constraints. Ideology and matter are intertwined indissolubly, just as are consciousness and language. "It is self-evident, moreover," says Marx at the end of this section, "that 'spectres,' 'bonds,' 'the higher being,' 'concept,' 'scruples' ['*Gesperster*,' '*Bande*,' '*höheres Wesen*,' '*Begriff*,' '*Bedenklichkeit*'], are merely idealist, speculative, mental expressions [*Ausdruck*], the concepts apparently of the isolated individual, the mere images of very empirical fetters and limitations [*die Vorstellung von sehr empirischen Fesseln und Schranken*], within which move the mode of production of life, and the form of intercourse coupled with it [*zusammenhängende Verkehrsform*]" (E45; G359).

Chapter 9

1. See Werner Hamacher, "Amphora (Extracts)," *Violence: Space*, ed. Mark Wigley, guest issue of *assemblage: A Critical Journal of Architecture and Design Culture* 20 (1993): 40-41, for an admirably succinct and penetrating discussion of Heidegger's notion of place and space in the context of Aristotle, Celan, and others.

2. M. Heidegger, "Bauen Wohnen Denken," *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 2 (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954): 19; *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 145. Further references will be to these texts, identified as "G" and "E."

3. Brian Ingrassia, in a brilliant book forthcoming from Cambridge University Press, discusses this in detail from the perspective of biblical theology. The book is based on his dissertation, "Vanquishing God's Shadow: Postmodern Theory, Ontotheology, and Biblical Theology," University of California, Irvine, 1993.

4. "Das Ding," *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 2: 59; "The Thing," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 186. Further references will be to these texts, identified as "G" and "E."

5. Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," *The Resistance to Theory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 11.

6. See the entry on the Indo-European root *bheu* in *The American Heritage Dictionary*. Two, or more, can play Heidegger's game of etymology hunting.

Introduction

WS uses in the Dream
topographical as the position in the
hemisphere...

Marcel Proust is one of the great topographical poets, taking poet in its wider sense of "maker with words." The important questions about topography are raised by the attempt to read certain sections of *Remembrance of Things Past*. One section of "Swann's Way" is called "Place-Names: The Name." A section of "Within a Budding Grove" is called "Place-Names: The Place." As these titles suggest, Proust knows that topographical considerations, the contours of places, cannot be separated from toponymical considerations, the naming of places. An admirable paragraph in "Place-Names: The Place" shows Marcel (not Proust himself, the reader should remember) thinking he can tell what a place is like from its name. He wanted, Marcel says, just once to take that 1:22 train from Paris to Balbec, "in order to become acquainted with the architecture of Normandy or Brittany."¹ Marcel thinks he knows what the stops along the rail line must be like from their names on the train schedule. Marcel's mistake, if it is a mistake, is not unlike the error the young Pip makes, in Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Pip thinks he can tell what his dead parents were like from the form of the lettering on their tombstone: "Philip Pirrip, Late of This Parish" and "Also Georgiana Wife of the Above." The paragraph in "Place Names: The Name" is a glorious exercise in Cratylean² topographical poetry:

of Puck
the
men
by Sander

Vitré, whose acute accent barred its ancient glass with wooden lozenges [*vitré*, of course, means "glazed" in French]; gentle Lamballe, whose whiteness ranged from egg-shell yellow to pearl grey; Coutances, a Norman cathedral which its final consonants, rich and yellowing, crowned with a tower of butter [*que sa diphthongue finale, grasse et jaunissante, couronné par une tour de beurre*]; Lannion with the rumbling noise, in the silence of its village street, of a coach with a fly buzzing after it [*du coche suivi de la mouche*; possibly an allusion is made here to one of the fables of La Fontaine in which a fly does buzz after a coach, though a "fly" is also a kind of vehicle for carrying luggage attached to a coach], . . . Quimperlé, more firmly anchored, ever since the Middle Ages, among its babbling rivulets threading their pearls in a grey iridescence [*entre les ruisseaux dont il gazouille et s'empere en une grisaille*]. (E422; F389)

Marcel performs here a complex rhetorical operation of performative projection on the basis of the contingent material qualities of the names. This is analogous to Swann's falling in love with Odette because of the similarity of her face and body to a painting by Botticelli, because of a flower, a note from her, and other such signs. He assumes these signs indicate what she is like within herself. Such readings are shown to be always false, but also always unavoidable. They are posited on the assumption that each sign or cluster of signs corresponds to a unique, individual person or place behind the sign, to which the sign gives access. If Odette looks like the Botticelli woman, she must be like what Swann imagines that lady to have been, with all the aesthetic resonances Swann associates with the Renaissance. Vitré must have lots of old glass barred with wooden lozenges, Coutances must be buttery, just because the names sound like that. The name Venice gives access to that city: "I did not then represent to myself cities, landscapes, historical monuments, as more or less attractive pictures, cut out here and there of a substance that was common to them all, but looked on each of them as on an unknown thing, different in essence from all the rest, a thing for which my soul thirsted and which it would profit from knowing. How much more individual still was the character they assumed from being designated by names, names that were for

themselves alone, proper names such as people have!" (420-21). This sounds so plausible, it is presented so persuasively, that it takes an effort to go on remembering that Proust is presenting here with loving irony an absurd infatuation. It is not that he does not say in so many words that these readings are false, but even so, we easily forget, no doubt because we do exactly the same thing in our own daily personal, social, and political life. There must be lots of deer, one thinks, on Deer Isle, Maine, and Irvine, California, must be a serious and earnest place where they grow grapes.

"Topography": the word combines the Greek word *topos*, place, with the Greek word *graphein*, to write. I speak above as though the word names solely the contours of a given place, but "topography" is in fact a complex word. Etymologically, it means the writing of a place. The English word "topography" has today three meanings, one obsolete. The obsolete meaning is the most literal: "the description of a particular place." Now the word means either "the art or practice of graphic and exact delineation in minute detail, usually on maps or charts, of the physical features of any place or region," or, by metonymy, "the configuration of a surface, including its relief, the position of its streams, lakes, roads, cities, etc."² At first the word meant just what it says: a description in words of a place. ¹ That meaning became obsolete. ² The word then came to mean the art of mapping by graphic signs rather than words. Hardly any map, however, is without inscriptions in two different kinds of words: general terms ("mountain," "river," "coral reef") and proper place names ("Mt. Chocorua," "Swatara River," "Key West," to take examples from Wallace Stevens's poetry). By a further sideways slippage "topography" has come to be the name for what is mapped, apparently without any reference to writing or other means of representation. General names and proper names, however, seem so much a part of the topography of a given region that it is difficult to think of the region without them. What would Key West be without its name? This third usage, in any case, is now the most common. It is the product of a triple figurative transference. "Topography" originally meant the creation of a metaphorical equivalent in words of a landscape. Then, by another

transfer, it came to mean representation of a landscape according to the conventional signs of some system of mapping. Finally, by a third transfer, the name of the map was carried over to name what is mapped. Today we might say, "We must make a topographical map of the topography of Key West," using the word in two different ways in the same sentence. The implications of this third figurative transfer are subtle and far-reaching. The power of the conventions of mapping and of the projection of place names on the place are so great that we see the landscape as though it were already a map, complete with place names and the names of geographical features. The place names seem to be intrinsic to the places they name. The names are motivated. By a species of Cratylism they tell what the places are like. The place is carried into the name and becomes available to us there. You can get to the place by way of its name. Place names make a site already the product of a virtual writing, a topography, or, since the names are often figures, a "topotopography." With topotopography, the act of mapping, goes topology, the knowledge of places, or as the dictionary puts it, topology is "topographical study of a particular place; specif., the history of a region as indicated by its topography." Toponymy, finally, is "the place names of a region or language."³

This book investigates a cluster of related concepts as they gather around the central question of topography. How do topographical descriptions or terms function in novels, poems, and philosophical texts? Just what, in a given text, is the topographical component and how does it operate? The other topics in the cluster include the initiating efficacy of speech acts, responsibility, political or legislative power, the translation of theory from one topographical location to another, the way topographical delineations can function as parable or allegory, the relation of personification to landscape, or, as Thomas Hardy puts it, "the figure in the landscape." There is always a figure in the landscape. The way speech acts operate in literature and in life is the most pervasive of these additional topics. All are approached from the perspective of topography. Though they may not all seem at first to be connected to mappings of some landscape, imaginary or real, it is easy to see, for example, that the

question of speech acts comes up in investigating what is involved in the naming of places. This, in turn, is related to the politics of nationalism as they involve border demarcations and territorial appropriations. Deciding whether to have street signs in French in Montreal or in Welsh in Wales is not a trivial issue. The question of transporting or translating theory from one country to another raises the question of the degree to which a given theory is rooted in one particular culture, able to function only in a specific place.

The approach is made throughout by way of the reading of examples. In each reading I have allowed the text to dictate the paths to be followed in raising and answering one or another set of my topographical questions. This means that each chapter provides a particular perspective on the presupposed conceptual landscape, a perspective allowed by that text alone. Or it may be that each chapter contributes to the creation of that landscape. This tension between creating and revealing is one of my topics.

Though the chapters, with the exception of the first and the last, are organized according to conventional generic and historical progressions, they do not provide a conceptual progression or argument. Putting Nietzsche after Plato may indicate no more than that Nietzsche had read Plato, while Plato had no way of reading Nietzsche. But that does not mean that Nietzsche is more "advanced" than Plato. Far from it. Without doubting the overdetermined distinctions that separate philosophy from literature in their intellectual, disciplinary, and social uses, the readings attempt to take each text at its word without presuming to know beforehand how its generic placement ought to impose a way of reading. This is signaled by the interweaving of chapters in a roughly chronological sequence on novels, poems, and philosophical texts. Each chapter, then, contributes a new view of a terrain that always seems to have been there already when we move into it, though the text and its reading, it may be, are performative speech acts bringing the terrain into existence. It is impossible to make a decision about that, since the only way to approach the terrain is through the readings. About this strange feature of speech acts, that they may create that in the name of which they speak, though it is impossible

to be sure about that, and in spite of the urgent need to know, the chapters themselves have more to say.

To propose another figure for the way the chapters are arranged: all of them taken together may be thought of as like the transparencies superimposed in palimpsest on a map, each transparency charting some different feature of the landscape beneath: annual rainfall, temperature distribution, altitudes and contours, forest cover, and the like. The landscape "as such" is never given, only one or another of the ways to map it. That, as I have said, is what topography means, or at any rate that is one of its meanings: the mapping by way of conventional signs of some terrain. Since another meaning of "topography" is the preexisting configuration and nature of a given region, the word "topography" contains the alternation between "create" and "reveal" I shall investigate.

A final figure for the organization of this book would see it as a virtual hypertext, presented in a somewhat arbitrary sequence through the necessity of the printed book. All but the first of the chapters were written on the computer, and that one has been transferred there and revised. All were written with a certain set of topographical questions in mind. The chapters when called up into the RAM or "random access memory" of a computer do not exist as a linear sequence. They exist rather as a strange spatial array in which the chapters can easily be arranged in different orders and through which various lines of exploration, in a different way in each case, are possible by following different paths of relation. Each chapter can be related to the others by a multitude of different conceptual and figurative links. The order of the chapters in the printed version is a somewhat arbitrary sequence that signals certain relations but hides others.

This book began with what seem easy questions to answer: What is the function of landscape or cityscape descriptions in novels and poems? What is the function of topographical terms in philosophical or critical thinking? The answers seem obvious. Landscape or cityscape gives verisimilitude to novels and poems. Topographical setting connects literary works to a specific historical and geographical time. This establishes a cultural and historical setting

within which the action can take place. In philosophy and criticism, topographical terms (such as "method," which means "according to the way," in Descartes, or Kant's account of "symbols" like "ground," "flow," and "substance," in paragraph 59 of the third *Critique*) are subordinated to logical and rational thinking. Overtly topographical terms in philosophy and criticism are, so to speak, transparent illustrative metaphors, handy ways of thinking. Their original spatial and material reference has been eroded as they have been turned into conceptual terms. *Grund* in Kant has nothing to do with the ground Kant walked across every day in Königsberg to get from his house to the university. But is this really so? *Topographies* attempts to think this question out through the reading of examples in which landscape "description" (I use the blandest word for it) occurs—place names in both the generic and proper sense: river, stream, mountain, house, path, field, hedge, road, bridge, shore, doorway, cemetery, tombstone, crypt, tumulus, boundary, horizon, "Key West," "Egdon Heath," "The Quiet Woman Inn," "Balbec," "Quimperlé," "Sutpen's Hundred," "the old bridge at Heidelberg," and so on. Do they, I have asked, have a function beyond that of mere setting or metaphorical adornment? In reading each text I have allowed the text to dictate the paths to be followed.

In attempting to investigate my question I have found myself encountering in different ways within each topography the atypical. This is a place that is everywhere and nowhere, a place you cannot get to from here. Sooner or later, in a different way in each case, the effort of mapping is interrupted by an encounter with the unmappable. The topography and the toponymy in each example, in a different way in each case, hide an unplaceable place. It was the locus of an event that never "took place" as a phenomenal happening located in some identifiable spot and therefore open to knowledge. This strange event that took place without taking place cannot be the object of a cognition because it was a unique performative event. This strange locus is another name for the ground of things, the preoriginal ground of the ground, something other to any activity of mapping. The atypical inhabits the individ-

the
ATOPICAL

Shakespeare
→ Shogun kein outfall base non given ...
relates of death, trees etc. as unplaceable
in the world

ual psyche. Why can desire not be satisfied in a happy coincidence of consciousness with the hidden other within the self? It haunts language. Why cannot language ever be wholly clear? It interferes with interpersonal relations, relations with the "other." Why can they never be wholly satisfactory or fulfill desire? It underlies society and history. Why are they so often a panorama of violence and injustice? It generates the opacities of storytelling. Why can no story ever bring the things it narrates wholly into the open? The encrypted place generates stories that play themselves out within a topography. Narration is a way to talk about it, which means personifying it. Such personifications, like prosopopoeias in general, seem a form of knowledge but are in fact potent speech acts. They have to do with doing rather than knowing. Whether or not all this can be clearly known and shown in critical readings the readings themselves will investigate.

Deer Isle, Maine

July 9, 1993

*- Said says in 1993
Joseph?*

§ 1 Philosophy, Literature, Topography: Heidegger and Hardy

tout fleurira au bord d'une tombe désaffectée

—Jacques Derrida¹

It seems to me an interesting idea: that is to say, the idea that we live in the description of a place and not in the place itself, and in every vital sense we do. —Wallace Stevens²

A spot whereon the founders lived and died
Seemed once more dear than life; ancestral trees
Or gardens rich in memory glorified
Marriages, alliances, and families,
And every bride's ambition satisfied.
Where fashion or mere fantasy decrees
Man shifts about—all that great glory spent—
Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent.

—W. B. Yeats³

The notion that landscape provides grounding for novels has hardly given rise to a distinct mode of the criticism of fiction, as has the criticism of character, or of interpersonal relations, or of narrators and narrative sequence. Nevertheless, certain once-influential forms of criticism, for example, the phenomenological criticism of Gaston Bachelard, Georges Poulet, and Jean-Pierre Richard, base themselves on the space, inner or outer, constituted by works of literature. This sometimes means, in such criticism, attention to landscape as such in literature. Richard's essays on Stendhal and Flaubert in *Literature and Sensation* are cases of this, as is the guiding metaphor of Poulet's *The Interior Distance* or of Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. An important branch of modern geography investigates the mental mappings we make of our environments, whether "we" are aborigines or dwellers in modern cities. Topology